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UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 000583

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SUBJECT: AU CHALLENGES ANJOUAN'S BACAR IN COMOROS

REF: ANTANANARIVO 573 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The African Union insists deposed island president Mohamed Bacar must allow island elections on Anjouan June 17; however, it cannot so far enforce compliance. The renegade Bacar is reportedly fortifying his position on the island against possible attack. (Note: No AmCits are on Anjouan at present.) Results for the islands of Grand Comore and Moheli indicate a June 24 second round will be needed in both elections; promising challengers lead in both races. Late June 13 the President of the Union of the Comoros, Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, wrote to President Bush seeking U.S. military assistance to overcome the impasse (Septel).
END SUMMARY.

Bacar Does Not Budge

¶2. (SBU) Deposed island governor Mohamed Bacar remains in control of Anjouan and plans to "inaugurate" himself June 14 following his sham election June 10 (reftel). African Union (AU) Envoy Francisco Madeira delivered an ultimatum to Bacar June 12 that the June 17 election be allowed "or else there would be consequences, including the use of force." Union Government officials insist the AU must deploy immediately if an election is to be held June 17, and that Bacar must allow inter-island travel. The Union Government further warned Bacar that if he prevents the June 17 vote, he will be barred from being a candidate. Bacar reportedly remains defiant.

Fortress Anjouan

¶3. (SBU) A civic leader in Anjouan reports that Bacar has deployed his militia all over the island to guard against a possible attack. Bacar's well-armed personal army of about 200 has reportedly placed mortars high on hills to fight off an assault on the island and distributed weapons to civilians. Rumors continue to circulate that Bacar has obtained weapons from allies in the nearby French territory of Mayotte.

Grand Comore and Moheli Results

¶4. (U) Late June 12, the Union Government convoked the press and

observers to announce results from the June 10 elections in Grand Comore and Moheli. In a minor victory for Union President Sambu, the Grande Comore incumbent, el-Bak, failed to make it to the next round. Instead the top two vote-getters, pro-Sambu Abduloihabu (known as "The Albino") with 16 percent and Larifou with 14 percent, will face off on June 24. In Moheli, challenger Mohamed Ali Said and incumbent Mohamed Fazul will go to the second round.

COMMENT: Brinksmanship

15. (SBU) Bacar, in true warlord fashion, has been gradually shedding the fig leaves of legitimacy in his bid to cling to power. The AU sent the right message, but Bacar may well be prepared to call its bluff. If the elections are not held on June 17 on Anjouan, the Union of the Comoros will be facing a de facto secession. Post appreciates the Department's fast turn-around on the June 12 press statement. PolOff was able to deliver the remarks in person to Comoran media in Moroni June 13. Union Government officials thanked us for the encouraging words of support for Comoran unity and democracy. Septel details President Sambu's letter to President Bush in which he concludes that only military action can now rescue the Union, and seeking U.S. assistance in this effort. END
COMMENT.

SIBLEY